

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with Tommy Milliot,
July 18 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

THOUGHT WORKSHOPS

Discussions artists-spectators with Tommy Milliot, July 19 at 16:30,
site Louis Pasteur Supramuros - Avignon Université

CONVERSATIONS À LA MAISON, LE FESTIVAL CÔTÉ LIVRE

The McAlpine Spillway (The Breach) by Naomi Wallace,
encounter with the author, July 15 at 11:30,
at the bookshop of the Festival d'Avignon, Maison Jean Vilar

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- April 2 and 3, 2020, Théâtre du Bois de l'Aune, Aix-en-Provence
- April 8 to 10, Théâtre Joliette Scène conventionnée pour les expressions contemporaines, Marseille

THE BREACH

In the basement of a house located in a modest suburb in a "possible Kentucky" in 1977, four teenagers make an oath that will forever change the adults they'll become. Fourteen years later, they're back together to attend the funeral of one of them. And if they talk about their lives in the years since they last saw each other, it is all that is left unsaid that fascinates us. Silence becomes the cornerstone of a modern tragedy. Through this superposition of times, Tommy Milliot explores the realism of American writer Naomi Wallace and leads us down to a troubling place, built exclusively with light and sounds which infiltrate the space of the stage. Like a social play, *The Breach* is a fiction which serves as a mirror of a certain America stuck between two different times. It's as much about social class as it is about gender, in this play where "the question of consent is at the heart of this adolescent negotiation."

TOMMY MILLIOT

Tommy Milliot founded the Man Haast company in 2014, with the project of working on contemporary writing. He likes to play with words, light, and space as raw material and to explore their relationship to the bodies of the actors and of the audience. He directed Frédéric Vossier's *Lotissement (Housing Estate)* in January 2016 at the Rose des Vents Scène nationale Lille Métropole. The show then joined the 70th edition of the Festival d'Avignon after winning the prix Impatience. He also directed *Winterreise*, by Norwegian author Fredrik Brattberg, for the Festival Actoral in 2017, then at the Next Arts Festival. Naomi Wallace's *The Breach* is the third play he has directed.

NAOMI WALLACE

Naomi Wallace is a Kentucky-born award-winning playwright. Her plays, which include *In The Heart of America* and *The Liquid Plain*, have been performed throughout the world. *One Flea Spare* became part of the repertoire of the Comédie-Française in 2009, making Naomi Wallace the second American author to be performed there after Tennessee Williams.

The MacAlpine Spillway (The Breach) by Naomi Wallace,
published by éditions Théâtrales,
is on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.

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GYMNASÉ DU LYCÉE MISTRAL

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL JEANNETEAU

By creating your company, Man Haast, you've begun a wide research about contemporary writing...

Tommy Milliot : We founded the company in 2014, with the stated goal of highlighting contemporary playwrights and living authors. I first came across contemporary writing through the Actoral festival, with Frédéric Vossier's play *Lotissement (Housing Estate)*, which won the prix Impatience in 2016 and was also performed at the Festival d'Avignon that same year. I also wanted to discover texts by foreign authors. Thanks in particular to the work of the Maison Antoine Vitez, I discovered Norwegian author Fredrik Brattberg in 2017. That was my first experience of Scandinavian dramaturgy, which doesn't focus as much on psychology. It opened my eyes to foreign writers; I discovered at once an author and a culture. We then founded a small reading committee with playwright Sarah Cillaire, within which we share our discoveries. That's how I came across the work of Naomi Wallace, an American from Kentucky. The story of *The McAlpine Spillway* was such that I wanted to tell it onstage right away. The title is a reference to a place in the United States, so the translation, *La Brèche*, is an interpretation. The title refers to a dam, a place where water overflows and spills out. I wanted to tell a fictional story, with the very realistic and rich writing of this American author, very different from everything I'd worked on before.

What drew your attention in particular?

The story moved me deeply, in large part due to its dramatic structure, with two juxtaposed periods, 1977 and 1991, two pasts which echo each other. The only present is that of the performance. It's a complex story; it's about the tragedy experienced by four teenagers in 1977, who explore the question of sexual desire and consent. It all begins with a simple game, a dare. The story takes place in the basement of a small suburban house in a "possible Kentucky." Two teenagers, a 14-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl, live there with their mother after the death of their father, a factory worker. They come from a humble social background. Their world comes to clash with that of well-to-do America through another teenager, the son of the director of a pharmaceutical lab... The play is anchored in a powerful social reality, with a critical point of view when it comes to the different worlds in which it takes place. The boys swear an oath to defend the youngest, who is bullied at school. Each accepts to sacrifice his most precious belonging to prove his dedication to the others. Without saying too much about the mystery, let's just say that Jude disagrees with the boys but still accepts parts of the oath, which will have decisive consequences on their future. We then meet them again fourteen years later for the funeral of the youngest, who committed suicide.

The reasons of this tragedy are revealed little by little over the course of the play, with a constant back-and-forth between the carefree teenagers they were in 1977 and the adults they've become in 1991. The mystery of those fourteen years slowly unfolds... The audience has to explore the mechanism that led to tragedy and interpret the impact it may have had on their adult lives.

Does this play offer a specific vision of America?

The subtext of the story condemns how easy it is to gain access to prescription drugs in the United States and explores the question of consent. Two different time periods overlap and echo each other: several months in the lives of the teenagers in 1977 against one evening in 1991. The very subject of the play is political, it strangely resonates in the aftermath of the Weinstein scandal. But it was written before, and while it is critical towards our modern world and its vices (in particular the strong division between social classes), it doesn't explicitly support a specific cause. And while there are contextual references, such as 7-Eleven supermarkets or B.B. King's "Rock Me, Baby," the author chooses to make the fiction very clear, with very theatrical twists and turns... *The McAlpine Spillway* remains a play about a "possible America."

What does the double narrative look like on the stage?

There are only four characters, but they are played by seven actors, since the story comes back to three of them fourteen years later. I chose to have two actors per role, as the author wanted, first because faces and bodies can change a lot over fourteen years, and it seemed wise to play with this relationship to raw realism which is already present in the fiction, in the writing. I'd say it should be possible to believe in the fiction without any artifice, in a desire to access the story directly. I'm not interested in adding things but in subtracting them, so there's nothing showy about it. We explore the colour black as well, because the female character, Jude, is tied to that colour in the story. The walls are defined by this black, by the void, nothingness. Sound also helps to define the space by coming as close as possible to the audience, seen as a sum of different individualities and not as an indivisible ensemble. I want the audience to experience this black with all their senses, I want them to know the void. This is the very first time this text will be performed, it was translated into French in 2017 and has yet to be performed in English. The text was rejected in the US several times, in part due to the way Naomi Wallace condemns the pharmaceutical lobby. It's a true contemporary tragedy.

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Interview conducted by Moira Dalant and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach